

Toward Translating Evangelize as Evangelize!

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It seems intuitive. It seems logical. But since 1388 the Greek verb “evangelize” has not been translated “evangelize” in the English Bible. What a strange quirk of Bible translation!

John Wycliffe in his translation of the Bible in 1382 translated almost every one of the 54 uses of *evangelizare* [Latin for evangelize] as “evangelise” or “evangelysing” [Old English]. The 1388 revision of Wycliffe published after his death *changed every use of “evangelize”* to “preaching the gospel”, “showing Jesus”, or something other than evangelize. This change in translation remained through the Tyndale Version, the King James Version, and has been followed by **every** version of the English Bible since that time [with the exception of six uses in the 2000 Holman Christian Standard Bible]. How can such a verbal discrepancy be perpetuated for so long?

If you are a reader of an English New Testament, as I am, you will find approximately 115 uses of the verbs preach or proclaim. In reality, 61 uses are translations of the verb *kerusso*—“preach” and 54 are translations of *evangelize* into preach. My classes in evangelism cover quite a different content than what is taught in a typical preaching class!

Following are some of the verses that contain *evangelize*, and you will notice the impact of translating these as “evangelize”. Here are five of the ten uses of “evangelize” in Luke (adaptations of the NASB):

- Luke 3:18, “So with many other exhortations he [John the Baptist] evangelized the people.”
- Luke 4:43, “But he [Jesus] said to them, ‘I must evangelize the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.’”
- Luke 8:1, “Soon afterwards, He [Jesus] *began* going around from one city and village to another, preaching and evangelizing the kingdom of God.”
- Luke 9:6, “Departing, they [12 disciples] *began* going throughout the villages, evangelizing and healing everywhere.”
- Luke 20:1, “On one of the days while He was teaching the people in the Temple and evangelizing, he was confronted by the chief priests and the scribes with the elders.”

Here are ten of the fifteen uses in the Book of Acts:

- Acts 5:42, “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and evangelizing Jesus as the Christ.”
- Acts 8:4, “Therefore, those who had been scattered went about evangelizing the word.”
- Acts 8:12, “But when they believed Philip evangelizing the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.”
- Acts 8:25, “So, when they [Peter and John] had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were evangelizing the many villages of the Samaritans.”
- Acts 8:35, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scriptures he evangelized him about Jesus.”
- Acts 8:40, “But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept evangelizing all the cities until he came to Caesarea.”
- Acts 11:20, “But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch and began speaking and to the Greeks evangelizing the Lord Jesus.”
- Acts 14:7, “And there they [Paul and Barnabas] continued to evangelize.”
- Acts 14:21, “After they [Paul and Barnabas] had evangelized that city and had disciplined many, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.”

- Acts 15:35, “But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and evangelizing, with many others also, the word of the Lord.”
- Acts 16:10, “When he [Paul] had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to evangelize them.”

Here are 14 of the 21 uses of evangelize in the Pauline epistles (Paul only uses *kerusso*—“preach” 19 times!):

- Rom 1:15, “So, for my part, I am eager to evangelize you also who are in Rome.”
- Rom 15:20, “And thus I aspired to evangelize, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man’s foundation.”
- 1 Cor 1:17, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to evangelize, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.”
- 1 Cor 9:16, “For if I evangelize, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not evangelize.”
- 1 Cor 15:1-2, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel by which I evangelized you, which you received, in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word by which you were evangelized, unless you believed in vain.”
- 2 Cor 10:16, “So as to evangelize regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been done in the sphere of another.”
- Gal 1:8-9, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should evangelize you contrary to how we evangelized you, let him be anathema! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is evangelizing you contrary to what you received, let him be anathema!
- Gal 1:11, “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel of my evangelization is not according to man.”
- Gal 1:23, “but only, they kept hearing ‘He who once persecuted us is now evangelizing the faith which he once tried to destroy.’”
- Eph 3:8, “To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to evangelize to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.”

It was incredible to me to see the impact of unearthing this one word in the Bible. I am amazed at how many times various persons in the Bible were involved in a ministry of itinerant evangelism, and of how many times the Apostle Paul and others addressed this important mandate!

But, you may ask, doesn’t “preach the Gospel” mean the same thing as “evangelize”? Please consider Mark 16:15, which states, “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.’” The original words for “preach the gospel” in this verse consist of three words “preach the gospel”—*not* “evangelize”. If God had chosen to use “preach the gospel” (as in Mark 16:15) in every context that He used “evangelize,” He could have. But He did not. He chose to use the verb “evangelize.” If one believes in verbal inspiration (that every word is inspired by God, cf. Matt 5:18), then the conclusion for translation is quite clear—why not use evangelize to translate the Greek word *evangelize*?

Please consider the necessity of translating evangelize as evangelize! Who knows, the proper translation of “evangelize” may spur a revival of evangelism among God’s people?